

HOFESH SHECHTER
COMPANY

barbarians

A trilogy by Hofesh Shechter

A resource pack for students and teachers



"a fascinating, volatile evening,
as cerebral as it is crazy"

The Telegraph

hofesh.co.uk

barbarians

A trilogy by Hofesh Shechter

"Rock gig lighting, rapid cinematic editing, and post-industrial baroque music all combine in a heady cocktail of sound and vision"

The Stage



Part I: the barbarians in love

Premiere November 2014, Austria

Choreography and Music:
Hofesh Shechter

Original Cast:

Chien-Ming Chang, Frédéric Despierre,
Yeji Kim, Merel Lammers, Attila Ronai,
Diogo Sousa, Paula Alonso Gomez
(understudy)

Lighting Collaborator: Lawrie McLennan

Voice: Victoria with Natascha McElhone

Additional Music:

François Couperin, *Les Concerts Royaux*,
1722: Jordi Savall & *Le Concert Des Nations*,
(2004)

Part II: the bAD

Premiere April 2015, UK

Choreography and Music:

Hofesh Shechter with the original cast
Maëva Berthelot, Sam Coren, Erion Kruja,
Philip Hulford, Kim Kohlmann

Lighting Collaborator: Lawrie McLennan

Costume Maker: Amanda Barrow

Additional Music:

Mystikal, *Pussy Crook*: Tarantula (2001)
Hesperion XX, Jodi Savall, *Paavin of Albari*
(*Alberti*): Elizabethan Consort
Music 1558-1603 (1998)

Part III: Two completely different angles of the same fucking thing

Premiere July 2015, Germany

Choreography:

Hofesh Shechter with the original cast
Bruno Guillore, Winifred Burnet-Smith,
Hannah Shepherd

Lighting Collaborator: Lawrie McLennan

Additional Music:

Abdullar Ibrahim, *Maraba Blue*:
Cape Town Flowers (1997)
Hesperion XX, Jordi Savall, *In Nomine V*
a 5 (White): Elizabethan Consort *Music*
1558-1603 (1998)
Bredren and MC Swift, *Control: Control*
(2014)
Hofesh Shechter

Please note that *barbarians* has an age guidance of 14+. The work contains explicit lyrics, swearing and nudity. This resource pack reflects the work and as such contains some swearwords in the text. None of the video clips included contain any swearing, explicit lyrics or nudity.

If you feel that this may not be appropriate for your group, please use one of our other resource packs for *Sun*, *Political Mother* or *Uprising*. These can be found here: hofesh.co.uk/participation/resources-for-teaches-and-students

barbarians was co-commissioned by Sadler's Wells London, Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, Théâtre de la Ville Paris, Berliner Festspiele Foreign Affairs, Maison de la Danse Lyon, Festival d'Avignon, HOME Manchester, Festspielhaus St Pölten (including a working residency) and Hessisches Staatsballett, Staatstheater Darmstadt/Weisbaden (including a working residency).

contents

The Creative Process: Interview with Hofesh

the barbarians in love

PG 4

THE bAD

PG 6

Two completely different angles of the same fucking thing

PG 8

Things to try

Hofesh inspired warm up

PG 10

Creative tasks

PG 10

Study breakdown

PG 11

Some suggested points for discussion or written work

PG 12

Insights from the studio

Thoughts from the dancers

PG 13

Interview with Rehearsal Assistant & Dancer Winifred Burnet-Smith

PG 15

Behind the scenes

Interview with Lighting Collaborator Lawrie McLennan

PG 17

Links & Supporting Information

PG 19

Participation Opportunities

PG 20

Company Information & Credits

PG 21

Appendices

Appendix 1: *the barbarians in love* – lessons text

PG 22

Appendix 2: Hofesh in conversation

PG 23

Appendix 3: Visigoth of Dance – article by Neil Norman

PG 24

the creative process

"I'm ripping my heart out and trying something experimental and new and it can go horribly wrong."

Hofesh Shechter



Interview with Hofesh, shortly after the UK premiere of *barbarians* Part I: the barbarians in love

When we last spoke about *the barbarians in love* you said "It's a sketch of what I want to make...I won't know what it is until I've made the other pieces in the trilogy." Since then you've made a huge amount of changes - a fearless decision to change it like that, after a premiere. You haven't just tinkered with it, you've performed open heart surgery on it! Do you feel it's fearless?

No...it's just work I needed to do! I was more nervous about putting the 3 works together because the moment you do that I knew it would be hard, that there would be a lot of work ahead of me... but it felt absolutely necessary. I didn't know exactly what I was doing - it's hard to change something that is already there.

When this trilogy started coming together...well in fact the first time I understood what it would be, what it had to be, was when I watched the full premiere. I watched it and I understood that what the trilogy was going to be was the duet, and all the rest of it (*the barbarians in love* and *THE bAD*) is the preparation for that. So in a way it doesn't matter if *the barbarians in love* is the perfect piece or not... It's a thought, then *THE bAD* is another thought, then the duet is really the heart of the thing.

So the work will always be performed as a trilogy? The three pieces are not stand alone works?

I think the piece is far from being 'clear' perhaps...like you watch and say "Oh I understand what this is all about..." but I think you watch the first and second parts, then you come to the duet and you get this snapshot of a feeling - of your life, of something important but you can't quite say what it is. Everything comes together at that moment. I think that at the end you have some sensation of a focus being pulled together. I think you don't get this thought unless you see the first two parts, so there will never be a time when the duet is a stand alone thing. Nope, never!

This trilogy, the whole...it's about a relationship basically, and perhaps the different stages or phases of love in a relationship?

Yes...when I saw it all in one place at the Berlin premiere, suddenly the duet hit me. I mean let's be honest, the duet is not really a 'dance' piece is it? It's a series of events. It's thoughts. In that sense I feel the evening is far from being perfect in any way. It's structurally wrong. I mean it's all wrong! But...I'm at peace with it because it is... real. There is something...it's touching something...somehow from all this mess. So for this reason I feel at peace with it. I can leave it now. I'm finding it really interesting, the dynamics of the work.

So you'll let it go now? That doesn't sound like you!

Well ok...*the barbarians in love*... I need to work a bit more on that part specifically, it's now become clear to me what it has to be. The purpose of it or the idea of it is very simple actually, it doesn't need to be any more than that. It can be that silly sci-fi world where they are being taught something, being told what to do. You don't have to completely understand what and why. There is energy there, something horrible happens, we're not sure exactly what it is, there is a mess and then it's over. I didn't try to do more than this! It became very clear to me that I just needed to focus this particular unsettling experience for the audience. It's fun, a bit unnerving, but it's just to understand where we are. After that it's just an emotional experience.

The disembodied computerized voice. Who is she?

She is many things - I was looking to make her sound like a mother, female, a lover, cold and warm in a way, but then I had a moment when I said no, it's just a sci-fi piece. It just has to sound like a robot. One that is trying to be nice.



“I wanted to make it really clear – it’s a very simple situation of education. You enjoy the beauty, you enjoy the power.”

Hofesh Shechter

The long prologue – in the dark...very disembodied. The disturbing lights and the sounds of what – an abduction? An enforced medical procedure? It’s a long time before anything is revealed on the stage. You are not putting the audience at ease here...

Yes...um...well actually I want that part to be MUCH longer! Really. I want to work on that part a little more. Working in a tech rehearsal with the moving lights is so time consuming that we had to settle for a version of this electronica type prologue, but as soon as I have time I’m going to make it longer still. It has to have another few minutes added to it. It’s kind of ridiculous. I know that. It arrives at these ridiculous peaks, with the shooting lights and so on, but there is still a lot I want to do with that part, with the beginning. I don’t think I pushed it far enough. It has to bombard the audience a bit more. I think I can still make it bigger. So you sit there for the first few minutes and just think “*What the fuck is happening here?*” So that when you arrive to the actual ‘dancing’ you already feel like your head is being totally messed with.

The disembodied voice giving the dancers lessons. Where did that come from?

I can track the birth of that image to when I was making *the barbarians in love* and this idea of educating a person. The night before my daughter couldn’t sleep and I was trying to help her get sleepy and I said to her “*Sweetie, every day comes to an end.*” Then I thought, why did I say that, those words are strange. The next day I was in the studio and I made that one of the ‘lessons’ and that made me think of evolution. I wrote down that phrase and I also drew an image – some of the dancers fall to their knees and some of them become cave men. The idea of an end is funny when you think of the cycle of life. That was the growth of this movement, from a very mundane, home situation...to evolution, to death.

And this moment it occurs a couple of times in the evening...

Yes, I like echoing things between my pieces – it brings a weight to them, for me at least.

"It might be a huge mistake, It might be horrible...but I'm willing to try."

Hofesh Shechter



Part II: THE bAD

What is this piece for you? Where was your head when you were making it?!

Well...*THE bAD* for me in a sense was always clear. It had to be like ... "fuck you". That's all. Whatever happened...it's just a very urgent piece. As an audience member I think at a certain point you go "Ach...there is no point in me trying to follow this! I'm just going to let it happen to me." You observe the flow of it, but you don't need to think about it deeply.

You call *the barbarians in love* your sci-fi piece, so what world were you heading for when you were making *THE bAD* at night, in an underground studio?

Honestly? I was heading nowhere! I'm not kidding. There was one and only one purpose to the process, which was to let whatever was inside us, out. Without value judgement, without stopping ourselves, without assessment. The feeling was - if it happens, it's allowed to be. That was our motto.

Have you ever approached any of your other work in this way?

No. Never. It's reckless. But you can see a lot of the results in the movement material. It's completely unpredictable. A lot of times in the studio when I reviewed what we came up with I thought "Oh my god, no...really? We're doing this? I can't possibly put that on stage." But then I was like "Yes, why not. Who am I to decide what has a value and what doesn't?" And as result of behaving in this way, it really made me question my values too. The way we as human beings say to each other that this is a 'good' artistic moment. Well, why? Who says it is? It's all just connected to your cultural background, perhaps your education. But you know if you show any of this piece to an aboriginal tribe for example, they will either connect to it or they won't. Probably not, in the case of this particular work!

Can you chat a bit more about this idea of 'good art' and its value...it's such an interesting argument.

For me *THE bAD* takes apart the notion that 'art' has a real value. So in the studio when we were making it, that was my ONLY aim. Then towards the end of the creation process I started really panicking. I was thinking "How do I put it together?" I did a compilation of videos to send to Helen (Helen Shute, Executive Director of the company at the time) to show her where we are at. No particular order to them. And her response was "That's brilliant!" So I said to her, "No, no that's just flashes of it, it's not structured in any way yet". And I have to emphasise how random the selection I sent her was - some of it filmed on my iphone, some of it on the studio camera.

I just spliced it all together to send it. But then I thought, "Ok so what if this random selection is actually my starting point for the structure of the whole piece?" I thought that might be a way to tackle it. Literally you could throw a dice. It could be as random as that. So then I did start to try to put it more coherently together but the overall structure of the piece is a random compilation of moments. My aim was to use as much instinct as I could, to let go of any analytical structuring of the piece.

It's not what we expect from a Hofesh Shechter piece. There is gold, there are explicit hip-hop lyrics...

Yes, it's a ridiculous piece, you know?

“The idea was to try and kick myself out of my own head.”

Hofesh Shechter

There is almost a slapstick humour to this piece. Was it intentional?

Well I didn't aim for funny, but you can imagine when you say in the creation studio *"OK, anything goes..."* then stupid things happen. I didn't say *"Let's do something that is funny..."* but it turned out that way. For example the moment when everything stops, then the Hip Hop comes back...it's just stupid. We were all laughing. I was having fun. So I said *"Ok it's in the piece."* I mean I argued with myself at first, don't get me wrong! I said *"Of course this is ridiculous, of course you can't put it in..."* but then I thought why not? It's funny. Maybe it's embarrassing. For some people they will be like *"Oh, really? That is NOT funny."* Well ok, that's a valid thing to feel as well. Objectively from an alien point of view, it's funny.

During the creation period you slept all day and created at night. How was that?

It felt really good. I'd do it again. Maybe not for the whole of a process but I'd definitely try that again.

The dancers said it was amazing.

It was the BEST process of my life up to now. There was still a lot of fear for me – I could hear my brain worrying...I could hear myself say *"Well this movement is stupid...what am I doing? Where is the depth?"* But I just kept on going...

There is something about the night that is timeless. In the day you feel like the clock is ticking, we have lunch at that time, the day finishes at this time. You can feel under the pressure of the whole world around you. At night though it all felt less pressured. We never knew when we would take a break...I might say, *"Shall we break now?"* and the dancers might say *"No, no let's keep going for a bit..."* Or they might say *"...shall we break now?"* and I'd say "yes". The whole atmosphere was loose and relaxed. We'd try things...there was no deadline. You're just kind of working in a mush...and it's a very freeing feeling when you are trying to be creative. On the one hand time pressure makes you get stuff done. But on the other hand...if you want to get really creative, it needs to happen in a timeless space. The weird thing was that the studio had no windows – it was a bunker basically, so it didn't matter if it was day or night, but I could feel that there was no time and no place – we were not connected to the outside world, and this made it somehow perfect. We'd wake up at 11 or 12 midday, have brunch together, then wander to the studio around 9pm. We were out of London, away from our reality. So everything about it was timeless, space-less freedom. I think it's really important to create bubbles like that in creation. The idea of working at night – I was thinking of letting go, and the mind holding on to the cold light of day, analytical, considerate – whereas at night you have a different vibe – losing yourself, finding yourself. It all grew organically in my mind.

You've said that the gold costumes mean the dancers can be superheroes, gods, anything goes...When did you think 'I want gold lycra in this piece'?

I think it was before I asked about working at night. Basically I wanted to try to make a bad piece. Really bad. I wanted to try to make something that felt wrong. That was the starting point, and then I'd see what happened. You know so often we use costumes that show the dancers as real people...well this time I thought they should wear gold lycra bodysuits because that was something I would never do, I mean I'd just NEVER go there! It's showy, pop, disco...I hate all that. So I thought, *"Well that's what I'm going to do then."* I dared myself to keep on going with it.

Did you wear a gold bodysuit too?

Yep. The first few days I wore it too – just to get the feeling that they were in. It makes me look at the body differently. It's really beautiful.

The hip-hop track. It's just not something you'd expect to hear in one of your pieces. Do you know much hip-hop? Where did you find it?

Well I listened to hip-hop when I was a bit younger, around 23. I like it. We were in the studio and I told the dancers it would be good to try something to this type of music. So we were just throwing tracks in, just finding them on YouTube. I said it has to be the rudest track possible. Because I would never do that. One of the dancers found it so I said *"OK let's work with this."* I downloaded it and we used it. There are parts of the track that are not in the piece – they are just going beyond offensive. I find them too abusive, it makes me mad. Even I have some morals that can't be broken! So the track selection was quite random like that.

And the juxtaposition of the hip-hop against the renaissance track, putting those two types of music against each other...

Well it's been done before hasn't it? I mean I'm not original like that! It's that whole baroque versus rock thing. I didn't think about it too much. The baroque track – I love it. Stillness is good with it. You can find meaning in it all if you want to but honestly there are no reasons behind this piece.

This is the first piece you've made where the dancers speak. How did that come about?

I wanted Phil (Phil Hulford, original cast of *THE BAD*) to create embarrassment, to capture this cringe moment. And he totally does. It's so uncomfortable. And it's improvised of course so every evening it's different. I hope he has fun with it.

“What is ‘good’ art? We have no idea. It's absolutely culturally subjective.”

Hofesh Shechter

"The whole evening is just about the duet. It's not really a dance piece – it's like seeing someone think."

Hofesh Shechter



Part III: Two completely different angles of the same fucking thing

You've said this part of the trilogy is the core of the piece, the heart. It's the longest duet you've ever made - did it feel long when you were making it?

No, it could have been longer, but not in the context of the whole piece. In the studio there were so many powerful images we created and all the time I was thinking "...but *WHAT* exactly am I trying to say here?" That feeling went on for a long time. I decided on the structure during the last two days in the studio.

With the duet there was a point when I just thought, let it be. I don't know exactly what it's about. It's a feeling and I had to say to myself "*let that feeling be*". For me it's a feeling of slipping away, and perhaps that is the best feeling it gives. It's very sweet, it's very sad...something doesn't stick between them. It can be beautiful but it's slippery, no reality sticks. It's perhaps about the slipperiness of life. That nothing in life stays. It has a smokiness. Once I accepted that, I created a flow in the piece that feels at times random. I was searching for the gravitas in it – it's in there somewhere. For me the most powerful moment is the end of the duet, when everyone takes Bruno (the original cast) and his last dance...there is something I understand when I watch that. For me that's the piece.

It's tender and also brutal. What kind of notes do you give for this duet?

We have worked in the studio for so long over the years you know... so they found themselves in this piece, we didn't speak much about it. I let them discover a lot, and I discovered them too. The duet is as much mine as it is theirs. Wins and Bruno (the original cast) these two dancers though...I mean it's like working with Al Pacino and Meryl Streep you know? You don't give them the script and talk them through it... They chew through it until they make it theirs.

The lederhosen costume... and the silk blouse. When did the costume ideas come?

After *THE BAD* I just wanted to slap the work into the direction you would least expect after that grunge and all the gold. The first thing that came to my mind – was this retired, healthy, do the right thing, kind of guy... he likes to walk in the fresh air in the hills, he's living life right, he's happy. The opposite angle to *THE BAD* infact. That was the first thing that came to my mind, I wanted an Austrian hiker look, so I Googled it and that was the first image I found, with the shorts and the hat. The woman, I tried to keep it culturally neutral – middle aged, maybe British, a lady. A cup of tea and life is nice, you know? The piece is maybe a fantasy, but even a fantasy leaves you no options... so it becomes a specific and narrow world that they live in. It can be funny, sad...

“There is something about it that is acceptance – that’s the way things are. It’s a bit hopeless...but it’s also reassuring.”

Hofesh Shechter

You created this duet last of all. When you started to put all 3 pieces together, did you ever wonder or worry about where the end was?

I knew I wanted to use the ‘bingo’ step for the end, when they all shuffle. There is something about it that is acceptance – that’s the way things are. It’s a bit hopeless...but it’s also reassuring. The end was made on the very last day before the premiere. There is a moment when she is dancing and *the BAD* dancers are rocking out behind her. I took some dancers aside and I said “*I need some MTV-style moves*”. So they went into the corridor at the theatre and filmed themselves doing some music-video style dancing. They showed it to me and I looked through it and said “*Ok, let’s have that movement followed by this one.*” I just randomly picked an order to it. The end image came from an improvisation – so it’s a bit dodgy, everything falls apart. I usually say “*Right, now we have to tighten it guys...*” but I didn’t do that this time. I had to accept that this is the end, it’s gentle, it leaves me with a feeling of ‘life is shit but...’.

What has surprised you about making the whole trilogy?

Well, if you see the first 5 minutes of the evening, you would NEVER guess where this piece will end. I mean how the hell did we get from Sci-Fi to this ending? I like that. I like that it’s unpredictable, and I accept what it is. I’m at peace with it. Also at a certain point in the process I really stopped caring about how people will take it. It comes from a generous place. It’s a nice way to bring it to people. I have a level of confidence in the work that is very pleasant. There will be people that don’t like it, critics that will slash it but it doesn’t change anything, it’s still here, you can’t change that.

This trilogy is thought provoking, ambitious - you don’t seem to stop pushing yourself, the dancers, the audience...

I am really excited to bring it to London finally, it might be a disaster or it might be great. I feel that there is something that moves us in there. I feel like I got the closest to ‘art’, whatever that means, than I have ever been in all the works I have created. In the sense that there is an acceptance rather than trying to create the perfect experience for the audience. Maybe I’m wrong – I’m sure the critics will argue differently! I’m sure there will be hundreds of people that will find it awful! But there is something in accepting and letting go of the work. Picasso once said something like ‘*...through the layers of lies...it touches a truth somehow...*’ and that is how I feel about *barbarians*. There is something in there that is tangible somehow.

“It’s perhaps about the slipperiness of life. That nothing in life stays.”

Hofesh Shechter



things to try

Hofesh inspired warm up

Before you start, allow some time to warm up and get into the right frame of mind. Use this Big Dance clip vimeo.com/131820606 to see how Hofesh works when he warms up with his company.

Either work with this clip interactively, following his directions alongside his own dancers, or take some of his tasks and work through them at your own speed.

Idea 1 – feet

- Standing in parallel, loose and open in the space.
- Take a moment to feel a freedom in all the joints, allow the hips and shoulders to 'breathe', the spine to feel soft and fluid, the head to float.
- Start to create movement in the feet – trying to create many tiny twists, turns, pushes and pulls in all the small muscles of the feet. Push against the floor as much as you can. The body is relaxed and loose. Let your weight transfer across your feet, everything is quiet.

"This looseness creates stretches in your back, your pelvis, in your legs...it naturally warms you up...it creates more movement..."

Idea 2 - strings

- Imagine pieces of string attached from your palms to your centre. Stretch your arms apart, feeling tension in the imaginary strings, but looseness in the body. Try to stretch the strings in many different ways and directions.

"Feel that you are stretching this elastic, the further you stretch the more tension there is...the body stays soft, very casual..."

- Allow this stretching to affect your body more and more.

Idea 3 – strings development

- Continuing with this idea, your imaginary strings are now also attached from each foot to your centre, and from your head to your centre, and from your palms as before. So your body is connected with 5 rubbery strings. Move continuously as you stretch your strings. Start to imagine the strings get thick and hard to stretch, and then loose, light and easy to stretch. Notice how this affects your movement.

"The idea is that the whole of the body is connected, there is a sense of totality..."

Idea 4 – web of strings

- Now your strings can be attached between any body parts (head to shoulder, knee to hip etc...) as well as to your centre. You can also imagine external strings pulling you from other parts of the space. Allow this to expand your movement further, pulling your body in different directions.

"This inspires you to move in different ways but you also keep a sense of connection between your body parts...it's like you are in a web of strings...like somebody is using you like a puppet."

Improvisation task for warming up

Using all these ideas, follow the task in this link with Hofesh's directions. vimeo.com/131924640

Creative task

Part I: *the barbarians in love*



Watch this clip vimeo.com/157466127

This is a short clip though rich and deep in movement and imagery. With a partner watch it through a few times, perhaps following one dancer in the group. Some things to take note of and discuss with your partner:

- The dancers' transitions around the stage
- Motifs that are repeated
- Use of unison movement
- The way Hofesh uses stillness
- The influence of classical ballet in some of this movement vocabulary
- The juxtaposition of loose and grounded movement - knees bent, pelvis heavy and and low, with classical ballet
- What else did you notice?

Now with your partner in a space, agree on 4 strong, dynamic movements from this extract that you like or can remember. You can keep referring back to the footage for inspiration.

- Put these 4 movements in a random order.
- Insert a slow running transition from the extract that moves you from one place to another.
- Now choose 2 moments of stillness from this extract and place them anywhere in your constructed phrase.
- Practise it through a few times with your partner noticing where you are in relation to each other
- Can you add this lift? vimeo.com/157466127

You have now created a Hofesh-inspired phrase based on his choreography for *the barbarians in love*. Now it's time to tap into the visual world Hofesh envisaged for this piece. Read through Yeji and Diogo's interview (page 13) to learn for yourself what kind of child-like and obedient state Hofesh and the dancers were creating.

"I was trying to create a very cold world, very simple," says Hofesh. "It's very clear what's going on. They are subjects and they are being subjected to lessons that appear to be very simple lessons of life. Yet at the same time it's not really clear what they are being taught. They do what they are told and sometimes they don't. We talked about children a lot when we were making it. There is a playfulness in it - they want to satisfy their teacher."

- Try to layer in these ideas and images as you dance your phrase. Notice if it helps to have a 'backstory' as you perform it. This is a key stimulus Hofesh uses when creating work, the dancers all have backstories and images for the movement.
- Use the soundtrack that accompanies this link as you perform it. Or perhaps use the additional music Hofesh sourced for this section - François Couperin, *Les Concerts Royaux*.

Study breakdown

Part II: *THE bAD*

Watch this clip vimeo.com/157466169

An insight from Hofesh

"I would never usually have dancers in a gold bodysuit...because I think it's ridiculous. It's eccentric you know...if you think about the characters in my work...normally very simple, very humble. So I decided to go with it, and we worked the whole time in creation in these gold catsuits (myself too), which meant they could do what they wanted - they are like gods, everything is allowed, nothing is too ridiculous. And in the same time you're looking at them and you're thinking 'it's really beautiful actually'."

"Cinematic in scope and ambition, his pieces are as playful as kittens one second, dark as night the next."

The Telegraph



Visual setting – some things to consider

- What atmosphere is created on stage through the lighting initially?
- Describe a change in the lighting state that occurs in this extract.
- Describe the difference between the two worlds created in these two different lighting states.
- Dancers and costume – how many are on stage and what are they wearing? Refer back to Hofesh's insights (page 6) and Kim and Erion's interview (page 14) for some context.

Aural setting – some things to consider

- What is the soundscore as the extract begins?
- Does it change through the course of this extract?
- Is the music recorded or live?
- What atmospheres are created by the soundscore?

Movement content – some things to consider

- Note the stillness. Where does it occur?
- There seem to be two different worlds in this extract, delineated by the lights and music. Does the movement vocabulary change too? If so, in what way?
- Try to describe a tone, an emotion you think the movement conveys in these two different worlds

Themes

An insight from Hofesh

"The evening for me as a whole deals with passion, and with the separation between what we experience inside and how we behave on the outside. There are a lot of problems there so we have to lie all the time, we have to pretend all the time. For me this is very interesting."

- How does this insight relate to the extract we're looking at here? Do you see the parallels between what Hofesh says and what he has created?



Some suggested points for discussion or written work

Discuss or write about the contrasts in material and atmosphere in the three different parts of the trilogy.

- Hofesh says that *the barbarians in love* is a thought, then *the bAD* is another thought, then the duet is '*the heart of the thing*'. What 'thoughts' do you think the first two pieces of the trilogy represent?
- Hofesh calls *the barbarians in love* 'my sci-fi piece'. What titles would you give the other two pieces?
- Hofesh made one of these pieces in an underground studio with no windows during darkness – he and the dancers slept during the day then assembled in the studio in the early evening and worked through the night. Which piece might you guess that he made in these conditions, and why?
- Hofesh says, "For me *the bAD* takes apart the notion that 'art' has a real value." Do you agree?
- On *the bAD*, Hofesh says "Literally you could throw a dice. It could be as random as that." Do you know of any other choreographers that have used chance and random selection to make work in this way? Do some research and see what you uncover. Do these randomly structured works share any common ground do you think?

- Hofesh says the duet is "*is not really a dance piece*." Do you agree? What defines a dance piece in your opinion? Does this duet qualify as one?

- The costumes in the final duet – Hofesh had really clear ideas about what he wanted these two characters to represent. Who do you think these people were? (For Hofesh's answers see page 8)

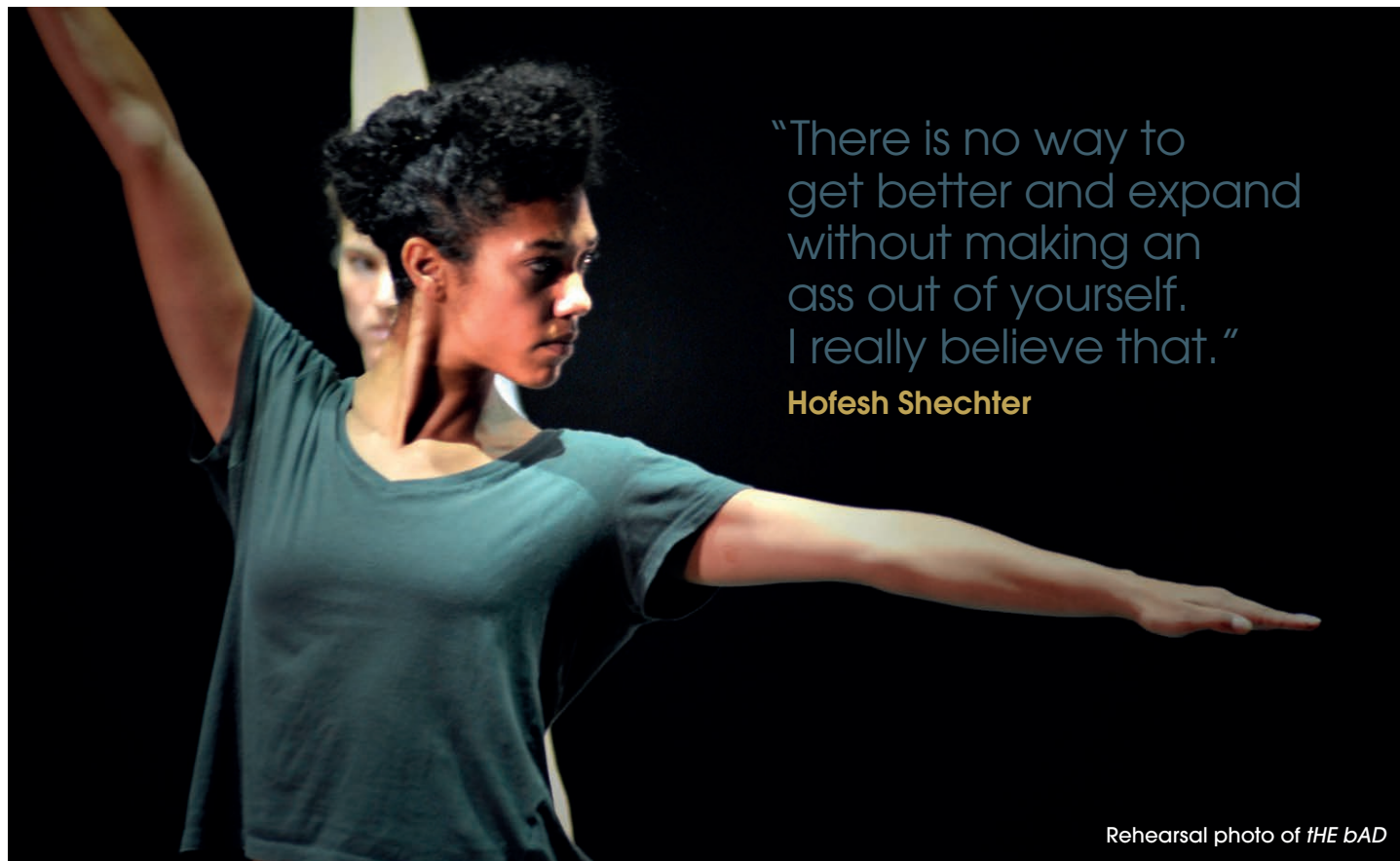
"We are one, son, I want you to see what I see, hear what I hear... feel what I feel. Dream what I dream, love what I love, touch what I touch, think what I think, breathe what I breathe, be...be...be free, son. Free to live your life as you wish, like a bird...I want to sing you a song..."

- Who do you think Hofesh was talking to here? His child? Or was this his father talking to him? Discuss the use of voice over in dance works, does it add to the narrative or not? Does it add to the work in this case?
- This trilogy has a gentle musical ending, fading slowly into the dark, not what we think of as a 'Hofesh ending'. When the piece began - sci-fi lights, strobe, big noise - could you envisage that this piece would end so differently? Discuss the arc of the narrative of the whole trilogy – even though Hofesh says there isn't sense to it – what was the 'story' for you? Was there one?

insights from the studio

Thoughts from the dancers

Diogo Sousa and Yeji Kim, both original cast of *the barbarians in love*, give us a window into the creative process from the dancers' perspective.



"There is no way to get better and expand without making an ass out of yourself. I really believe that."

Hofesh Shechter

Rehearsal photo of *the bAD*

What world do the *barbarians* live in? What atmosphere did Hofesh try to create in the studio?

Y: As usual, first Hofesh tried to find a right atmosphere for the new work and gave a few images to us dancers and we played with those. We had lots of improvising and contact or couple improvisation. Making random movement materials even if we won't use them in the end. Furthermore, it is always interesting how people understand a work in their own way. I think Hofesh had quite a precise image for this piece. Personally, I just remember one strong picture of 'well-educated kids'. The kids are very innocent and pure but they don't know what they are doing is cruel, horrible, good or right. Just doing without judging.

D: Yes these barbarians live in a world of innocence and naivety, where nothing is faked.

How was it creating a piece with just six of you, after such a big cast for *Sun* (Hofesh's previous work, 2013). It must have felt so different?

Y: Definitely. The atmosphere in the studio was calm and more settled. It made people connect more with each other and gave us space to think about the small details of the piece. It also allowed time to be patient with ourselves to find a right direction for our characters. Less of us in the studio meant more communication with Hofesh to understand the new work as a dancer and as part of a piece. On the other hand, everything was very fragile and sensitive. There was nowhere to hide, we were quite exposed to each other! I found it more challenging as a dancer, with less cast in the studio. I tried to not judge myself and open up. (Honestly, this was the hardest part I think). Often a new creation period is not so easy, but it is definitely a precious time for dancers and their choreographer.

How do you feel about this piece?

D: I feel it's a difficult piece to perform because it requires a lot of concentration to be physically precise and at the same time have the space in the mind to indulge into the character. In the end it's not as 'enjoyable' as performing *Political Mother* (where it's easy to connect on an emotional level) and it's actually quite disturbing for me personally. But it's an interesting challenge. It's hard to explain, sorry!

There are more men than women in this piece - is that significant do you think?

Y: I don't think that is so significant. I think naturally it came like that - Hofesh knew which dancers he wanted for each piece. Maybe the dancers' personalities are good with each other and he thought they'd work with the ideas in the piece.

How do you prepare for this piece mentally?

D: I get in the "kid" mindset, try to be really calm and simple (and think about the notes Bruno and Hofesh gave us earlier!).



Hofesh rehearsing *THE bAD*

And now Erion Kruja and Kim Kohlmann give us a glimpse into the strange world of *THE bAD*...

Can you describe the world of *THE bAD*?

K: Crazy, fun, tribal, connected to a bubble within yourself and the people you perform with. Unjudgemental, rich...

E: It's a world of freedom of creativity for me! With no judgment and mission to accomplish, but just pure creativity between six people.

How do you feel about the work now that it is out of the studio and has been shared with an audience?

K: I think it's a different reality but one that you can still somehow feel connected to as an audience. Even though we pull down a fourth wall and create a complete chaotic, unreliable mess... It's a trip. It is harder to keep it non-judgemental and really honest with an audience though. You do become aware of people's energy and eyes but it doesn't change the connection between us as performers, and the trip is still the trip.

E: It feels great to share our energy that we created after those weeks in the studio and I don't expect everybody to love it or understand it, but instead just to sit back and get the most out of this psychedelic world we created.

You created this work with Hofesh during the night time – how was that physically? And emotionally?

K: Physically I just felt jetlagged for the first week and that made things a little less controlled, but also deeper. I don't know how to describe it. Because we improvised a lot and because of this state where you don't completely feel like yourself you suddenly go into sensations more easily. Trying to understand what's going on inside and exploring every possibility. Emotionally, it felt like a secret mission. It was a really fun ride, quite free, crazy and unjudgemental with and towards each other. It made things a little surreal and I felt like we were living in a bubble.

E: This night time creation for me personally was great. Waking up and having four to five hours before work was just perfect. Physically and emotionally it felt great as well. Working at night brought something new for all of us and I would do it all over again.

And did creating at night bring a different quality or energy into the situation?

K: It brought a loose energy, and the energy of doing it for fun, for ourselves. Also the fact of waking up in the middle of the day and having a couple of hours before actually starting made things very different. It felt like you already had a bit of a day, the body was awake, the mind was already active and then we went into the studio. It was nice.

E: Yes! In my opinion we function differently at night! Our mind and body works differently and we have fewer boundaries.

Can you describe the piece simply, from inside the experience of making and performing it?

K: Trip, tribal, fun.

E: A psychedelic freedom of mind and body!

Would it be true to say that this piece has the most improvisation in all of Hofesh's works?

E: Yes!

K: I think it has very clear material and clear structure but when there is improvisation it's much longer than he normally makes – we call these parts of the piece 'events'. These are moments he doesn't control, they're totally free which is very different to how Hofesh usually works.

The gold lycra bodysuits – amazing! Does wearing this costume contribute to your connection to the piece or this world in any way?

E: Yes the costume was part of it since the very beginning of the process, and gave us the freedom to connect to any story.

K: We wore them every day during the creation and yes they definitely had a big effect on how we moved, how we felt, and what came out. A golden suit, it makes anything go...that's what we discovered. It looks ridiculous, sexy, odd, ugly, hero-like.

Did you learn anything about yourself or Hofesh that you didn't know whilst you were making this work?

E: Yes! I learnt a lot about how to let go and just be creative in the studio. It was a very rich experience for me.

K: I didn't know I was able to shut off so much and really be completely involved with only what is going on in myself and the people around me. And the fact that Hofesh succeeded, kind of, to make a light piece...

The dancers in Part I (*the barbarians in love*) have spoken about getting into a 'child-like' emotional state in order to connect to the world of that piece. Where do you need to be emotionally, in order to inhabit this unpredictable world of *THE bAD*?

E: For me it's about being in a psychedelic freedom of both my mind and body

K: I think I would describe it as going into a completely committed place and finding the ride. Doing it for yourself and finding the pleasure with each other. I can't find the right word...devotion maybe?

“His coiled, lolloping, muscular steps have an intensely feral energy and can turn on a sixpence between blazing with anger, effervescing with celebratory fervour, or radiating abject despair.”

Mark Monahan, Daily Telegraph

And finally, Winifred Burnet-Smith, original cast of Part III (*Two different angles of the same fucking thing*) tells us about how the piece came together, and what it feels like to perform it.

Hofesh says this duet is the heart of the piece, and that the other 2 pieces are the build up to the moment the duet begins. Do you feel the weight of that?

I wouldn't say that I feel the weight of that, but the beginning of the duet is definitely a nerve-racking moment. It feels like you're interrupting another piece, it's a strange feeling as everyone on stage is from one world and here you are bringing a whole new world onto the stage quite abruptly. It often makes the audience laugh, I guess because it's a bit of a surprise, so it can be hard to keep a clear focus and to stay connected to the mood of the piece.

Your character is so interesting to watch - she seems in control at first but gradually unravels. Or maybe she actually becomes her truer self. What is your perspective on that?

My perspective can change with every performance, what I find really helps is to completely connect with how I'm feeling at that moment - if I try to force something or recreate anything from another show it doesn't work. So sometimes one section can be very heavy and intense and another day it can feel light and playful. I don't really think of the piece as having a journey and for the character to arrive at any one place. I haven't made a story out of it, I just try to connect to Bruno and to the moment and to see where that takes us.

What are you doing whilst the other two pieces are on stage - how do you prepare?

I find it helps to warm up next to Bruno, we don't have to do the same thing but being in the same room is a bit of a ritual. Now and again we grab each other and do a bit of the partner work to check that things are working and that we're connected physically. I also try to push my physicality at some point before we go on, I feel like I need to know that I can go there before going on stage. There is also a mental preparation by seeing how I'm feeling at that time and trying to stay with that.

Can you talk a little about the creation process?

It was a short one! It was really fun, a lot of improvisation, anything went. As soon as Hofesh saw something interesting he stopped us and tried to develop it. It was all based around a relationship between a man and a woman, sometimes things were serious, sometimes things were completely ridiculous. Sometimes Hofesh struggled with knowing how far he could go with the ridiculous things, he often said, "Can we actually put that on stage?". Once we had all the elements, putting them together took a while, getting the order right and creating the right continuity was like a puzzle. Hofesh would come in every morning with a new order of things. Not everything made it in, we could have made a whole other piece with the material we didn't use.

What world/room did you create in the studio?

Hofesh talked a lot about something slippery, especially when creating the partner work. Trying but not quite being able to keep a hold of each other, slipping out of each other's arms. Other than that everything else felt pretty free.



Hofesh rehearsing *THE bAD*

“Creation is a messy process. Once things start happening, there is a chaos of ideas, emotions and sounds. I’m trying to put it together as if I were doing a puzzle. I don’t have a system, which is unfortunate because it is very exhausting. It’s like standing in the middle of a room full of toys.”

Hofesh Shechter



There are many touching moments in this duet, followed immediately by more brutal ones. How does that sharp change of emotions feel from the inside of the piece?

I really enjoy the contrasts and colours of the duet, from really heartfelt tender moments to aggression, this makes it really interesting to perform. Bruno often forces something out of me, sometimes he makes my blood boil - I love that he can force those emotions out of me and that I can react in exactly the way I feel at that moment. You don’t always get the chance in life to act on your primary emotions so to be able to do it on stage is hugely liberating.

Towards the end of the piece when you are dancing in front of Bruno with the dancers from both other pieces echoing your movements behind you – that looks lonely but there is also a freedom there. What emotions are you drawing on then?

I really struggled with this part at first, after everything that has happened beforehand in the duet it made me feel weak and vulnerable - I felt that I was being forced to dance for him, it felt very uncomfortable and the movement didn’t quite sit right on me. It took a lot of thinking about and getting it into my physicality to start to connect with it. I had to channel my femininity and sexuality, it started to become playful and slowly it started to feel empowering and liberating. It still gives me a feeling of vulnerability, laying myself bare and exposing myself, but I think that adds to the beauty of it and now I really enjoy that moment.

Your costume is plain trousers and a silk blouse. Hofesh says “...middle aged, maybe British, a lady. A cup of tea and life is nice.” Do you think much of your costume?

It’s not the most attractive costume but when I put it on it definitely helps to set the tone for me. It makes me feel older, neat, fragile and petite.

Is there any part in the duet that you love in particular and why?

The part that I love the most is the part that I fear the most – the improvised section. Anything is possible, every night is different.

Is there anything in the piece that feels more challenging?

There’s not one part that I’m not really fond of, if I’m not feeling something though or if it feels fake and pushy, that can be very tough and painful to get through.

This trilogy has had a beautiful response from audiences. Where do you place it in Hofesh’s repertoire – will it become a favourite to perform for you? Is it for example more or less emotionally grueling than performing *Political Mother*?

Definitely, it’s been a huge privilege to do this piece, to have the opportunity to have so much creative freedom on stage is a big honour. It’s not as physically grueling as any of Hofesh’s other pieces, but the level of presence that’s needed for this piece can be exhausting. You can’t hide behind steps or dark lighting, you’re on stage the whole time, there for everyone to see - it’s very thrilling.

behind the scenes

Interview with Lighting Collaborator Lawrie McLennan



How did your collaboration with Hofesh work for *barbarians*? Did he ask for you to create atmospheres/environments that he had a clear idea of, once you were in production week, or did you see the work a lot first in development, to get into the right vibe, make notes, and then make suggestions?

There are two different processes involved in this collaboration. The first part for me involves a lot of patience. I will sit quietly in the rehearsal studio whilst Hofesh is creating movement and energies with the dancers. I arrive in the studio in the latter stages of the creation process, and on my first day sit down behind my computer with a blank lighting plan. I sit and watch everything that is being made in the studio. If I have an idea or a question, I imagine how it could or might look on stage and I draw some lights on my plan. Sometimes Hofesh will come and sit beside me whilst the dancers are working on a section and we'll talk about some energies of the piece, and we talk a lot about "worlds". Almost everything that Hofesh creates takes place in one of these worlds. It is a lot to do with how the dancers and their characters respond to being manipulated by the things around them in these worlds, whatever they might be. The lighting is one of those things, and we will only put on stage something that we can justify is a part of the dancers' environment. Every light, and every cue has to add something.

"This production is dance for people who don't go clubbing anymore and want to feel reckless and wired again."

London Evening Standard

How much does Hofesh talk to you about these worlds that he and the dancers create? How much do they have an influence on what you are creating for the piece? Are they a starting point for you?

That's where the second part happens, away from the studio. Hofesh and I will sit down and listen to his ideas for music, watch videos of the dancers in rehearsal, and look at pictures and videos online and in books. We talk a lot about the images we wish to create, which can often be very abstract – for example: *"a warm, welcoming, gentle, friendly sort of cathedral of happiness that hugs the dancers"*. After what can sometimes be many of hours of sitting together, (or more often Skype-ing together as both Hofesh and I are rarely at home, never mind in the same country as each other at the same time due to our work schedules). I will then have a quiet think to myself and respond to Hofesh with pictures and descriptions of what I imagine we could put on stage, and he will tell me brutally what he thinks.

But it's not until we arrive in the theatre to start production week that we get to see what it is we have both been talking about and imagining. Thankfully, much more often than not it turns out we pictured the same things in our minds!

For *barbarians* was there any specific research you needed to do before you started to work on the design? How much preparation had you done before production week?

Although we are extremely lucky and have, by comparison to other UK companies, more time in theatres to realise our productions, there is actually very little time to complete all the work we have to do. Therefore I have to send the technical teams and stage managers in to the fit-up with huge amounts of information: what lights I want to use, where I want them to go, what colour I want them to be (although in *barbarians* there actually are only two colours - a cold steel blue in 16 lights, and everything else has no colour). I also will have prepared in advance some focus notes that tell the lighting technicians where to point the lights, and what shapes to make them. The stage managers and other technicians also need to know from me (in my job as Technical Manager) all the other details including: which dancers are performing in that theatre and so which costumes they need to prepare, where to hang all the curtains with accuracy to the centimetre, where the sound system is going to be set up, where the haze machines should go. So really I have to do a lot of preparation in advance and have to have at least a very good sense in my head of how the whole show is going to look.



“Provocative, pummelling, raw, and urban – unlike anything out there.”

The Georgia Straight, Vancouver

What's your favourite part of this design - the bit you are proudest of?

Actually it's the very final moment of the show. The whole company is together onstage performing an extremely simple movement as the lights very slowly fade out to darkness. One time we were watching this and Hofesh turned to me and said *"no matter how the rest of the show goes, if we get this moment right, the money shot, then we're golden"*. And I think that's what I really like about this moment – it is so very golden. All the lights are without any colour or enhancement, they're just used at a low level where they really glow, just like a fire, and it's incredibly warm and comforting. Even if what we are watching the dancers do is much more foreboding, dark and full of sadness. I like the contrast and the simplicity.

What was the most challenging part to design/source/run during the show?

There is a "light show" right at the very first 2 minutes of the show. It's only about 30 seconds long, but there are 120 individual cues that happen. We use a timecode system, that means all the lighting cues are triggered by and synchronised to the sound. All of the lighting cues are triggered with an accuracy of 1/24th of a second. Hofesh and I will watch a 2 or 3 second sequence sometimes 15 or 20 times altering the timing of the cue fractionally until we are completely happy that we think the lighting is perfectly synchronised with the sound.

There is also a moment of the show where the lights seem to just follow the dancers as they run around the stage. The moment lasts 12 seconds during the show, but it took the lighting programmer over an hour to make all of the lights move around the stage, in the very natural way that Hofesh and I wanted them to move. We didn't want them to look like computer controlled automated lights. The dancers then rehearsed the way they run around the stage with the light, each time adjusting the way they run and the timings of the lights. We repeated this maybe 50 times before we were happy with it, tweaking each time. When I watch the show I often don't even notice that the lights are moving, I just watch the way the dancers move!

What has been your best tour moment with Hofesh Shechter Company?

Is it too contrived to say having my birthday on the beach in Wellington in New Zealand, enjoying a day off, surrounded by people I really enjoy the company of? Failing that, standing on top of the Sydney Harbour Bridge looking down at the Sydney Opera House thinking, *"Our show is in there! And that iconic building is where I have to go to work in the morning..."*. Things could be much worse right?

Yes, things could be MUCH worse! So on the down side (if there is one!) what is the most crazy/hard/challenging part of back to back touring?

It's very hard to get what I call "a good cup of coffee". It's completely my personal taste, but I've only found it in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and London. Whenever I am anywhere else, away from home for a long period of time I have to drink tea instead, and then the first thing I do when I get home is switch on my espresso machine and make myself one. It's like therapy.

links & supporting information



barbarians

Trailers and photo gallery hofesh.co.uk/barbarians

the barbarians in love extract vimeo.com/157466127

the barbarians in love lift vimeo.com/157466167

the bAD extract vimeo.com/157466169

UK reviews

telegraph.co.uk/dance/what-to-see/barbarians-hofesh-shechter-company-sadlers-wells-review

standard.co.uk/goingout/theatre/hofesh-shechter-barbarians-dance-review-a-bold-blast-against-the-senses-a2952996.html

thestage.co.uk/reviews/2015/hofesh-shechters-barbarians-review-sadlers-wells-short-thrills

Venues where the work premiered:

the barbarians in love, 1 November 2014 at Festspielhaus, St Pölten, Austria festspielhaus.at

the bAD, 30 April 2015 at HOME, Manchester, UK homemcr.org

Two completely different angles of the same fucking thing, 3 July 2015 at Berliner Festspiele, Germany berlinerfestspiele.de

company

hofesh.co.uk



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Sign-up to our newsletter to be the first to hear our news hofesh.co.uk/signup

Hofesh is an Associate Artist of Sadler's Wells sadlerswells.com

Hofesh Shechter Company is a resident company of Brighton Dome brightondome.org

Hofesh Shechter Company is one of Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations artscouncil.org.uk

Hofesh on what inspires him

The thing that inspires me most is people. The way we think, live, feel, are conflicted, led, lead, hope, break, wish... The set of human emotions and how these reside within social order, or disorder, is one of my obsessions. People - there is the film director Stanley Kubrick. I think he has a unique vision and insight into human behaviour. Charlie Kaufman the script writer; Woody Allen; choreographers Ohad Naharin - who I learned so much from - Wim Vandekeybus; Pina Bausch; Mats Ek; William Forsythe; then Bobby McFerrin...the list is long.

Useful organisations

One Dance UK the new national body for dance launched in December 2015 encompassing NDTA, DUK YDE & ADAD

onedanceuk.org

NDTA - The National Dance Teachers Association

ndta.org.uk

Buy Hofesh's music

Fancy dancing to music composed by Hofesh?

In October 2015, we performed *Political Mother: The Choreographer's Cut* at O2 Academy Brixton as part of a 4 week long London season called #HOFEST hofesh.co.uk/hofest

To celebrate, we produced a download of Shechter's pulsating and cinematic score which features drums, guitars and strings.

"Effortlessly hip, endlessly energetic, exhilarating, sexy and loud enough to burst your ear drums." ★★★★★ **Daily Telegraph**

The music can be purchased for £9 from our ebay shop

ebay.co.uk/usr/hofeshco

participation opportunities

"I enjoyed the studio, the people, the atmosphere the dancers created – soft, friendly, non-judgmental, funny and groovy. Thank you so much for a beautiful experience..."

Participant feedback



Winifred Burnet-Smith leading a workshop

Participation has always been at the heart of our company's activity. We work with a wide range of people in diverse settings across the world to deliver inspiring encounters with Hofesh's unique style.

We can develop participation opportunities for schools, colleges, venues, dance houses, and youth and community groups lasting from two hours through to week long residencies, or even long-term partnerships.

Led by members of the company, our dancers draw on Hofesh's methodology to help participants find their way into the four themes that underpin his edgy, urban movement vocabulary; Energy & Emotion, Groove & Rhythm, Floorwork & Totality.

"The students were buzzing about it all the way home. It has to be one of the most thought-provoking days they have experienced, which resulted in it being one of the most discussed!"

Helen Frost, Dance Tutor & Subject Leader, King Edward VI School, Suffolk (partner school since 2014)

To discuss your needs or to book any of our participation opportunities, please contact our team by calling 020 7089 9473 or emailing

participate@hofesh.co.uk

For more information visit: hofesh.co.uk/participation

Workshops

Workshops consist of a warm-up class to introduce the movement style and prepare the body followed by an exploration of repertory, where participants will learn short extracts from one of Hofesh's works. Workshops can last from two hours to a full day (five hours).

Residencies

Residencies are an ideal opportunity for groups who wish to gain a deeper understanding of Hofesh's style. Lasting from two days to one week, participants experience a daily warm-up, a series of creative tasks and learn longer extracts from Hofesh's works. Residencies can culminate in the creation of a short piece suitable for an informal sharing.

Restagings

We often work with vocational training schools and junior companies to restage an extract from one of Hofesh's works for performance. This type of project requires two to three weeks of students rehearsing with us, whilst being released from their regular timetable. Restaging work is usually led by two company dancers who are joined by a member of our technical team during the production and performance period.

Past bespoke experiences have included lecture demonstrations, behind the scenes tours, audition skills, feedback on performance work and delivering aspects of university modules. If you have a particular project in mind, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We love to be inspired by your ideas.

company information & credits



Residency at Helenswood Academy, Hastings, 2014

For Hofesh Shechter Company

Board of Directors:

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Hofesh Shechter Company

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Thank You

Hofesh Shechter Company would like to thank our Patrons, and all the individuals who support us, for making such a difference to Hofesh's work since the formation of the Company.

Please visit

hofesh.co.uk/support-us/our-supporters
to read about the generous individuals who support us.

This pack has been written by:
Participation Producer Lucy Moelwyn-Hughes
in consultation with Hofesh Shechter and
Colette Hansford.

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Design: Stem Design

Appendix 1

“Yes I was thinking of those philosophies or faith systems that claim to have all the answers, of how it’s kind of ridiculous that anyone would think that writing a set of ‘rules’ can fix us all, can fix the mess of the world... they are all clichés I know...”

Hofesh Shechter

the barbarians in love – extract from the ‘lessons’ voice over
“Welcome.

This is your first lesson.

I want to sing you a song.
One, Two, Three, Four.

Welcome.
I am going to teach you about la...

Lesson One.
Order must be.

Lesson Two.
You are one
One together
One unique, together
You are one
You shall not want
You shall not need
Improve yourself
Be natural
Natural
Natural
Be good
I am going to teach you about life
You are one
We share
You are mine
I am yours
You are me
I am you
I am perfect
Perfect
Just the way you are”

“Lesson Nine.
You are not alone
(dancers repeat) “*We are not alone*”

We shall improve ourselves
You shall not want...
You shall not take...
One.
We share.
If you can’t find the... the truth lies here. Where else would you find it?
Don’t look back.
The truth lies here.”

Appendix 2

Hofesh in conversation: extracts from a post show discussion following the UK premiere of *barbarians* at Sadler's Wells Theatre, September 2015, as part of #HOFEST.

On performance as therapy

I don't see it or not see it as therapy but it *is* therapeutic actually. I don't intend for it to be like that but I can feel that through throwing on stage things that matter to me ...I can reveal the truth to myself or discover layers of the truth. I feel like I have to be experimental and maybe make a fool out of myself a little bit and that's how I will discover more things about myself, and perhaps the audience can discover things with me. There is something very liberating about it. I won't say epiphany, but there are little epiphanies that I can experience through making the work and sometimes through seeing the work on stage with an audience. There is something about the public humiliation or the sharing it with other people makes you feel things stronger and see maybe yourself from the outside. So yeah, it's a bit like therapy. I feel much better! When I started the process you had to see me then, it was horrible. Now, look at me, I'm fine!

On whether dreams or nightmares influence his work

My dreams sometimes are very ambitious. There are like, flying dolphins, and um... big things you know? There is just no money for that. But no, it's not very often that I dream scenarios. I take feelings from dreams though. I feel that dreams are like something that gives you direction for the day, or for your life. So if you have the feeling of a dream as you wake up and go into the day, I feel that I can learn a lot from that. It's funny that you should mention dreams; in a sense, with *THE BAD*, the middle piece, the golden one, I think there was an attempt for me to beat my mind, not to think too much. In a way it has the logic of a dream - which has no logic, which is just a very impulsive thing. Also the sense of the movement, the content, the structure, I was asking myself and the dancers the question,... whether we can make a piece actually, by just letting it happen and sort of accepting that anything that happens is fine.

On rehearsals and time

I think too much...part of this 'beating my mind' was that we went to work in Darmstadt, in Germany and there the venue has this...well they call it a studio, but really it's a bunker and it has no windows. I asked whether we can work at night time from 10pm to 4am and they said yes. So you know, we went for it and it was really amazing actually. When you work at night, you kind of lose a sense of time, a sense of purpose, a sense of trying to achieve anything. Also, knowing that everybody is asleep is kind of...it's weird, you feel like you're allowed to do other things. When you work during the day, you know that you're going to break at 1:30pm, you're going to have a break of 1 hour, normally there is a phone call and there is this and that but there, it was like...we just worked, and we almost didn't feel like we had to produce anything. We never knew when we were going to break. Nobody really knew what time it was. It was really fun. We then kind of started sleeping into noon normally. Woke up, had brunch, and had the afternoon off.

On the creation of material

Actually, in this creation, a lot of the material came from the dancers. A lot of it comes from me, and a lot of it from the dancers. It depends on which piece, but really it was a collaboration this time, a lot through improvisation, a lot through asking them to do things - giving them tasks and giving them a world, pushing them and seeing where it goes, leaving the camera on always, and sitting at home and looking for what's interesting. But yes, it was really a shared process this time.

On what advice he would give aspiring choreographers

Make work. Make a lot of work. Make work to perform. Make work to perform in front of people. It's the only way to learn. Don't experiment. Maybe you can experiment at home...but where the work happens, the work that we're doing, it's in front of an audience. This is the exchange; this is where you find out whether there is an exchange of energy, whether there is an expression. So just make as much work as you can that can be performed.

On relevance and self-relevance

It's not important in the work that the audience understands something about me, it's important to me that they are having some sort of emotional, intellectual experience. I'm here to trigger, I'm here to make you guys ask questions and get lost a little bit with me. There are moments where there are certain emotions and energies that are focused and we are hopefully sharing these things but especially in this trilogy, my aim is not for understanding. I don't think that anyone needs to understand what this was about or even understand something meaningful about themselves, beyond the experience of sitting here and having an experience...having a sort of energetic and emotional experience. If someone learns something from that about themselves, then great.

On whether he communicates personal stories through his work

I did tell a personal story, maybe it was a lie, I don't know. Yes, I told a personal story. I draw on my personal experience and I'm trying to trigger. It's a trigger for emotions, for movements, for energy and for an experience but it's not important for me that you will understand. If it was really important for me that you will understand my personal story, I'd sit here and tell it to you. It's not about the words. The words are just there to give it a direction, a feeling. It's a combination of things - the work is my work, it's about me, but there is a place where I learn from the work and there is a place of therapy, self-therapy where I process things. When I bring it to stage with the final edit though, it's not about you guys feeling sorry for me or happy that I'm fine now. No it's not about that, it's about the energetic experience.

On collaborations and how he feels about them

I feel excited. I'm trying to keep it interesting for myself and find challenges. With The Royal Ballet piece, the challenge was to get the movement material, the movement style into their bodies, see how it works together. With the opera, there were many challenges there. I was invited to choreograph but also co-direct, choreographing for music that is not mine, for structure that is not mine. There were a lot of challenges and joys inside that, so I was excited. That's why I walk into these projects.

On his creative process

The process is one word, 'chaotic'. It's an absolute chaos. There are no rules. I have no system. It's just a commitment and a persistence to try to find something that works. I throw music, sometimes pieces of music that came before a piece of choreography and I try them in the studio and start to connect with it physically. Sometimes there is a piece of choreography and I'm trying to create music that will fit it. I cut, pull, push, break, kill, bring - it's just chaos, and it's a very detailed work. I become quiet obsessive about exactly which music will work in which part. So it's a kind of nightmare trying to put these things together. I don't have a system. I don't want to have a system. I feel that not having a system keeps me very alert and awake to the process.

On the qualities he looks for in a dancer

The first thing that I look for is human quality actually. With some people, I feel that there is something human, something warm about their presence that they can connect with their emotions somehow. Then of course they need to have a set of skills and ability to dance. But really it's something about the eyes. I have to fall in love with them a little bit and feel that they move me because essentially that's what I want them to do on stage, to move us. I don't know if it's something you can practise...well I guess you can practise being honest... this is something I like in dancers, something honest and simple.

Appendix 3

Hofesh Shechter - visigoth of dance

Article by Neil Norman



It is easy to break things. But it's much harder to put them back together. Yet destruction carries with it the collateral notion of cleansing. By sweeping away the old, the established, the stale and the corrupt it is possible to start again with a clean landscape. Possible, but not always attainable.

The Roman Empire, the Buddhas of Bamiyan, the entire Etruscan culture – all have been annihilated one way or another by those whom we call barbarians. The Visigoths, the Taliban and the Romans (Ha!) are all subsequently lumped together under the same perjorative term. But the root of the word barbarian simply means 'alien' or 'foreign'.

"As you know, it's all right to treat barbarians barbarically," wrote Bertolt Brecht. "It's the desire to be barbaric that makes governments call their enemies barbarians."

It is fanciful to imagine Hofesh Shechter galloping through the dance Establishment with a sword in one hand and a copy of Rousseau's *Social Contract* in the other, smashing conventional structures and tearing down sacred cows. Where most artists attempt to seek order out of chaos, Shechter has made a habit of seeking chaos out of order. For only in chaos, he suggests, will we truly understand the truth of ourselves. One is tempted to call him a Neo-Dadaist but that is not quite accurate. His work is closer to the blazing, groundbreaking anarchy of *The Living Theatre* of Julian Beck and Judith Malina than the deconstructive antics and deliberate travesties of Tristan Tzara and Marcel Duchamp.

So why is his trilogy of dance works entitled *barbarians*?

"It is about the disconnect there is between ourselves, our bodies and the set of rules and culture around us," says Shechter. "We all have plans and we all fuck them up constantly because of the instincts that are driving us. I experience constant failing in my dreams of life. I am probably not alone in that."

barbarians was conceived as a trilogy, but a disjointed one. Each of the works can stand alone - from the first outing in February of *the barbarians in love* for The Associates programme at Sadler's Wells to the second work, *THE bAD* which premiered in Manchester's new arts venue, HOME. The third, entitled *Two completely different angles of the same fucking thing* - is a duet which Shechter claims is the point of the entire evening. But he only realised this when he finally saw all three performed together.

"The process of making this was so different to any other piece I have done. I wanted a trilogy but three different pieces. They each have different energies but they all tied together."

If working with baroque music for *the barbarians in love* was a first for him then his approach to *THE bAD* was even more of a self-imposed challenge.

"The second piece was an attempt to try and make a piece without thinking, because I think a lot. We made it in Germany and I decided to do it all at night. When you work at night, it seems timeless. And then I thought: 'What are the elements that I would NEVER work with? Gold bodysuits!' So that's what we went for. It was the most amazing creative process I have been involved in. It respects nothing. All the time we exist in a place where you don't know whether it's serious or not. You just accept that what happens, happens. And that's it. It's an 'anything goes' piece."

The duet that concludes the trilogy is something else again.

"I worked with the dancers who have lasted longest in my company. They are the ones I trust most. You need to be able to trust your dancers when you are going through events that are unstructured. The first time I saw the whole evening in Berlin I realised that the first two pieces are the preparation. The duet is the reason for them to exist. It's what this trilogy is about. It was the first time I was at peace with the evening. It's never perfect. But it's an honest snapshot of a moment in a man's life."

Shechter's life has informed his work in many ways – sometimes seriously and sometimes with mischief bordering on the adolescent. The drop-dead confessions he delivers in voice-over are shockingly candid – if they are true. Yes, the fact that he was abandoned by his mother at the age of 2 is well-documented, revealed in an embittered tirade in his all-female piece, *The Art of Not Looking Back*; but the fact of his infidelity – conveyed in the first draft of *the barbarians in love* – was not.

Ever reluctant to elucidate on the 'meaning' or the sources of his works, Shechter is nonetheless aware that he is unpacking his cultural history and personal memories that might otherwise fester in the depths of his psyche. It is evident in the mutated folk dancing of his youth in Israel, in the dance language of Ohad Naharin's Batsheva Dance Company as well as the politicised gymnastics of Yasmin Vardimon's company – both of whom he worked with before starting his own company. But the personal stuff is much harder to locate.

"There is a game with the audience," he says when pushed on the confessional aspect his work. "We are pretending, but at the same time it is real. There are things that are never spoken about in public. It is embarrassing. But embarrassment is power. It's part of the evolution of our race. In the new version of *the barbarians in love* I cut it at the point when the confession is about to start. We are playing a game – a powerful fantasy of life in the theatre where everything is pretence. But the emotions inside are real. I know I am creating confessions, creating more interruptions. It is now cryptic enough that no-one will make sense of it. And I am happy about that."

However great the challenge Shechter's works may be for an audience, they are nothing to the challenges he sets himself. Failure, for him, is always an option. It is evident in the amusement he expresses at how some observers interpret his work.

"Someone told me that a French or a German critic, I am not sure which, thought *barbarians* was about the financial crisis in Greece. Wow! The best moments I have seeing my work – or anyone else's work – is watching it and letting it be in the moment. Without any judgement. All of us are dance critics once we walk into the theatre. I think it should be treated like a day in the spa."

The idea that an encounter with any of Shechter's works, from *Uprising to Political Mother*, is like 'a day in the spa' seems faintly ludicrous. Can it be that behind his thoughtful, studious and civilised manner lurks the soul of a true anarchist? Maybe – whisper the word – a barbarian?

"Barbarian?" he says. "It is an expression of self-hatred, isn't it? On one hand I am a nerd. I have to be on time at rehearsals. I have to write music and be in a studio and create structures. I have said many times that the way I work with dancers is chaotic. But I think it is pretentious to call yourself an anarchist. I'm too nerdy but I fight that tendency in me. Anarchy is associated with violence and breaking things. So maybe I am. There is something in that."

He pauses. Thinks carefully about what he has just said. I suggest that what motivates him more than anything else is the desire to retrieve the concept of 'free will'.

"I'm at a place in my life where I would replace the term 'free will' with 'discovery in life'. I see that things erupt. The truth is actually revealed to me whether I like it or not. You can follow your truth or you can ignore it. It is predestined. This is a belief. I couldn't prove any of this. I believe that there is a sensation of freedom. But it is an illusion."

Depending on your definition of civilisation, it might be argued that we are all, in one way or another, barbarians. This is certainly true of the American writer Robert E. Howard, whose books of fantasy are veined with a philosophical dignity that persists today.

"Barbarianism is the natural state of mankind," wrote the creator of Conan and Kull. "Civilisation is unnatural. It is the whim of circumstance. And barbarianism must ultimately triumph."

Given Shechter's predilection for exploring the conflict between Man's natural instincts and the straitjackets of civilisation, I ask him if he believes we are trapped in a cycle of societal construction and destruction. There are those who claim that the barbarians are even now at the gate of Western democracy in the same way as the Visigoths hammered at the gates of Rome. Is this an inevitable consequence of a rational desire for order which runs counter – as Shechter believes – to our instincts?

"Obviously," he says. "But the West is looked upon as barbaric by others. It would appear to be inevitable. It would appear to be natural. Even with our high cultural values we can't stop it. We created a belief system and a value system which we can't actually match. It is beyond us."

But not, I venture, beyond Hofesh Shechter to search and destroy, illuminate and – possibly – reassemble.

Neil Norman is a dance and theatre critic for the Daily Express and The Stage.